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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [EAIR](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOMB SCARE AT AIRPORT HIGHLIGHTS SECURITY CONCERNS

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/  
d)

¶1. (C) On November 8, an "electronic cigar" was found on an inbound British Midlands (BMI) flight from London. The cigar, found by a cleaning crew once on the ground in Freetown, caused alarm because it was found hidden beneath a blanket under a seat, with wires protruding from either end. Breaching numerous security protocols, the cigar was turned over the BMI staff on the ground and the flight then departed for London several hours later. The cigar was eventually given to the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) stationed at Lungi, but after a considerable delay. It was later buried in sand behind the SLP post.

¶2. (S) The cigar was confirmed by British SOCA and SIS representatives to be clean, though the passenger it was connected to raised some concerns: Abdeljelil Ayeb, a Tunisian banker (DOB 02/06/1951, Ppt. T118496), traveled alone from Heathrow with no baggage, and did not arrive at the helipad for his scheduled flight from Lungi to Freetown. It was later discovered that he was a guest of President Koroma's, and visiting Sierra Leone only for an audience with the President to discuss investment. According to British and Sierra Leonean contacts, Ayeb is not a person of interest to either intelligence services.

¶3. (S) While this incident was benign, it raises significant concerns regarding the safety at both involved airports - Heathrow and Lungi. British sources wonder how the e-cigar was allowed on-board in the first-place, and why no one noticed or red-flagged Ayeb's lack of luggage. On the Sierra Leonean side, the BMI representatives breached protocol by not immediately turning the cigar over to authorities and failing to inform their own flight crew: both activities allowed the flight to return to London on-schedule, but at the expense of a thorough search of the plane, which would have been required had the incident been reported in a timely fashion. Sierra Leonean contacts are also concerned about the confusion that ensued once the cigar was handed over to the SLP, indicating that they panicked and did not follow their own standard operating procedures for a potential incendiary device.

¶4. (C) Comment: The British have reported the incident to their own headquarters, while the Sierra Leoneans assembled a high-level delegation of National Security Council Coordinating Group members to visit and review the overall security conditions at Lungi on November 19. Though the cigar proved to be benign, this incident reveals how ill-equipped the Sierra Leoneans would be in the face of a more sinister threat, and that the international airlines wield considerable autonomy in decision-making, at times to the detriment of regulations and safety standards. Once compared to an "outlaw town" in the Old West, Lungi Airport continues to be a significant achilles heel in the Sierra Leonean security apparatus: corruption is common, all-access passes are cheap and readily available, and the only authority figures are either on the take or ineffective. For any

criminal or terrorist looking for a location through which to transit illicit goods or worse to European destinations, the Lungi Airport may be ideal. End Comment.

FEDZER